

755 *Ena saireri!* which are the proper expressions used in hailing the *sovai* animal and are in this instance addressed to the *sovai* which the operator hopes to cast out of his patient. In other cases the Baigona doctor would simply place his lime-gourd and coco-nut-leaf basket one on either side of the sick man so that they might attract the disease (i.e. the *sovai*) out of his body into themselves. Again, in the most typical of expulsive treatments, viz. that of *bara*, it may be the *sovai* which is removed from the patient, symbolized, e.g. by a tuft of the dead man's hair. It is not necessary to give further examples to show that *sovai* diseases as well as casual diseases are amenable to the expulsive method.

#### Placatory Treatments

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782 There is, however, another method which is applicable to the former and not the latter. This is the method of placation, which to the native is as much a treatment of disease as is the use of the knife or the draught of medicine. The method is best exemplified by the practice of making offerings to the *sovai* in order to induce it to leave the sufferer. Thus we find sets of feathers or ornaments suspended in the village: they are meant for the *sovai* in general, or for some particular *sovai*—probably that of some recently deceased relative of the sick man. It is seldom that such offerings are actually abandoned to the *sovai*: it appears that they usually fall into the hands of the doctor who is attending the case. Natives are very reticent on this subject because they realize that the acceptance of payment for their cures is not always looked on with favour by the Government (the good reason being that, as the characters of the healer and the sorcerer are so mixed together, the acceptance of fees may degenerate into extortion). We may perhaps accept what [756] is often enough stated to be the rule, viz. that the doctor retains payment only if the patient recovers.<sup>1</sup> So we come

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Copland King relates a corroborative incident. He had allowed a Baigona healer to try his methods on a mission boy who was dying of consumption. 'Erero visited Frank every day to see what effect the treatment had. When he found it had done no good, he brought back the pay which had been given, and said that it was a sickness that Frank had brought from the white man's country, and his charms were of no avail. He replaced all but the tobacco, which had been already smoked, and gave necklaces to make up the value.' *Annual Report*, 1912-13, p. 134.

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upon a doctor carrying a bunch of valuable ornaments to his house. They have been handed to him by the husband of a woman who is apparently dying. He explains that he is about to hang them up on his house verandah as an offering to the *sovai* of a man not long deceased, who is supposed to be afflicting the sick woman. If this *sovai* wishes the woman to recover he will accept the presents (which means that they will remain in the possession of the doctor); if he allows the woman to die, then the doctor will return them to her husband, for they have not achieved their purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Apart, however, from these eleventh-hour acts of placation, there are the daily observances which have been constantly referred to in earlier chapters, and these may be regarded as in some degree a prophylactic placation; for they are not meant only to ensure general prosperity, but especially to ward off the sickness which *sovai* malignancy is so fond of inflicting.

In so far as sorcery disease admits of any cure, that cure also is a matter of placation. It is a case of 'squaring' the sorcerer. I have already pointed out that the doctor—whatever his speciality, be it *humbari*, *bara*, or any other—acknowledges his inability to deal with a case that he diagnoses as sorcery; and it has been seen that it is just then, when his stock remedies have been applied without success, that he falls back on this diagnosis. I have seen a Baigona man, celebrated as he was for his powers, stand aside assuming an air of complete indifference while a dying patient was surrounded with wailers. He had tried his own methods without avail, therefore he did not hesitate to say that the

<sup>1</sup> The doctor's responsibilities were indeed sometimes rather severe. I have myself been privately requested to hale one of them before the magistrate for his refusal or inability to effect a cure, and Mr. A. E. Oelrichs, a former Resident Magistrate of the Northern Division, gives the following extreme instance. A man had undertaken to cure a sick woman, and had received from her son-in-law as payment for his 'few passes' a dog and a pig as well as some native ornaments. Unfortunately, he returned next day, and, while in the village, the woman died. Her son-in-law then went up to the "doctor" saying, "You did not cure the woman, and, as I have paid you, I am going to kill you." The deceased admitted the fact, but did not attempt to run away. The three prisoners, all of whom were present during the interview, then went to their respective houses, obtained weapons, and, while the son-in-law spared the sorcerer, the other two hit him on the head with stone clubs. *Annual Report, 1910-11, p. 132.*

## SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

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A secondary activity of the Taro men is that of curing : the drumming and singing, or *kasamba*, is thought to be as efficacious for raising the sick as for raising the tubers in the garden. Their reputation as doctors, however, is somewhat marred, though not necessarily impaired, by the suspicion of sorcery. Still it is fair to say that this phase of their craft is not very pronounced. 794<sup>x</sup> 756 ●

In the course of a wide distribution and a life of ten years it is natural that a complex cult should undergo some differentiation. A subject of great interest is the origin of numerous minor sects ; and some of the more important have developed an individuality which will deserve special description on a subsequent page. 794<sup>x</sup>

The name *ba* or 'taro', which belongs properly to the actual plant, is used most vaguely and comprehensively by the natives for the Taro cult itself. To 'take the Taro' is to be infected with the cult, to learn the points of it from some one previously infected, to be possessed by the taro spirit, or, in the more usual way, by the spirit of the dead. The new movement is known simply as *Ba* or 'Taro', just as the former cult was known vaguely as *Baigona*. In the following pages the word Taro, with a capital, will substantively or adjectively be equivalent to Taro cult.

3. *Origin of the Taro Cult*

Where travel is so difficult and communication so imperfect, a new idea must spread itself principally by a succession of impacts. It will radiate from the place of origin, but those who dwell on the outskirts of the circle will have received their impulse, not directly from the centre, but from some intermediate source. Not only will the idea itself be changed by the time it reaches them, but the credit for originating the idea will be bestowed on many and various who were merely agents in its transmission. Consequently we find some little confusion on this point in regard to the Taro cult, and not a few who are more or less unwittingly made pretenders.

158 <sup>36</sup> THE TARO CULT  
 revellers are indulging in excesses which for the time being they cannot control. The reasons are, first, the power of universal example, and second, the sad fact that submission may become subjection.

With this third and very large class, however, the *jipari* is not a permanent phenomenon. The ordinary villager is prone to fall into a shaking-fit if others are doing so; but it passes over and, except that his power of resistance is probably weakened, leaves him little the worse. On the whole, I should make the same threefold division among those subject to *jipari* as among those subject to the Vailala Madness, viz.

1. Those who fall into the condition quite involuntarily. Some of these may be in greater or less degree 'Mental' cases.
2. Those who, for motives of their own, simulate the madness without giving way to it.
3. An important intermediate class of those who voluntarily induce the madness and, for the time being, surrender completely to it.<sup>1</sup>

To this I would add a comment which will seem obvious to any one who has often observed natives in the condition of *jipari*. As a collective phenomenon it is largely involuntary; as an individual phenomenon it is largely sham.

It will be necessary to revert to this question when we come to discuss the causes of the Taro cult and the attitude we should adopt toward it. The *jipari* in all its various forms cannot fail to excite our repugnance and certainly requires our careful consideration.

9. *The Taro Man as Doctor, Weather-Magician, and Sorcerer*

791 We have yet to see the Taro man in several subsidiary  
 756 roles—those of doctor, weather-magician, and sorcerer. There is a tendency in primitive society for many distinct functions to be concentrated in one person of pre-

<sup>1</sup> Report No. 4, 'The Vailala Madness', p. 9.

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928

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eminence. When a man is credited with supernormal powers in any department of life, he becomes an object at once of admiration and suspicion; and he would be more of a fool than he is if he did not make full and varied use of this imputed supernormality. Consequently, if a man by virtue of spiritual possession can prosper the taro, he can cure the sick and control the weather by the same means; and, it is to be feared, he can turn his gift of *mana* to account in other and less amiable directions.

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In respect of medical treatment the Taro cult has brought with it a few innovations, though these have by no means displaced the older methods. The Taro man makes free use of old and new. There are, however, in native belief several distinct sources of infirmity, according to which all ailments may be roughly classified. There is, first, the mild epidemic (*ywi* or *baumu*) which is regarded as a phenomenon of nature, brought by the cold wind, and which usually evinces itself in a headache and a fever. There is, secondly, a large class of ailments due to the evil influence of spirits of the dead; these are commonly attended by internal pains. Thirdly, there are those illnesses caused by sorcery (*kai*, *inja*, *saruka*), which have a variety of more or less severe symptoms. Now the illnesses of this last category are in a sense incurable: there is only one recognized way of curing the victim of sorcery, and that is for the sorcerer himself to withdraw or annul his evil influence. A Taro man will not treat a case of sorcery-sickness: he acknowledges that he can do nothing for it, and he has a means of diagnosis which is as simple as it is infallible. He tries his treatments: if they are not successful, and the patient is obviously dying or already dead, he says, 'I am sorry, I can do nothing: this is a case of sorcery-sickness.'

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As for the first category, those of the natural ailments, it appears that the Taro man will treat them with confidence, though they are said not to be fatal, and may be expected if left alone to cure themselves. It is with the

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756 second category, viz. those caused by the spirits, that  
 753 the Taro doctor is best qualified to deal. That the spirits  
 of the dead may afflict their surviving friends with illness  
 is an old Orokaiva doctrine; that the spirits of the taro  
 can do the same is presumably a new doctrine, associated  
 only with the new cult.

753 The native goes in real fear of his dead relatives and  
 775 in perpetual anxiety lest he should offend them and incur  
 [784] their displeasure. This is probably the reason why a dead  
 man's garden is taboo to his relatives: they fear he may  
 infect the products of it out of sheer malice. If a man ate  
 a banana which a *binei* had touched he would fall ill; so  
 also if he ate one of the *binei* animals, i.e. one on which the  
 dead was reincarnated; or, indeed, if he merely neglected  
 the offerings and the observances which are due to the  
 dead.

X 794 In the doctrines of the new cult it was maintained that  
 753 a man might give offence to the actual taro spirit, and be  
 776 punished by it with a sickness. Thus there were certain  
 784 varieties of taro, perfectly wholesome, which were made  
 taboo to the layman of the new cult. They were called  
*koropa*, or strong, and he ate them at the risk of illness.  
 So again, according to Buninia and Yaviripa, taro might  
 not be pulled without first consulting the Taro men. The  
 taro spirits would be angry with one who was so dis-  
 respectful as to break this rule, and would enter into him  
 and lay him up with a sickness.

It is not fair to pester a native for definite explanations  
 of abstrusities. The dead or the taro may *influence* for  
 evil the rash or irreverent, and this influence is felt to be  
 a kind of spiritual possession. Just as the taro spirit may,  
 in the accredited Taro man, be a fund of power, so in the  
 layman who has rashly or ignorantly offended, it may be  
 a source of sickness. We can only say that the native's  
 conception of spiritual possession is not less hazy than  
 our own.

755 The methods of the doctor are in the main directed  
 towards freeing the patient from the evil influence. The

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patient they thrust and withdraw quickly, or lay the spear point to his body and then snatch it away as if extracting something. Again, a Taro man may stroke the patient with *Kandoro* leaves (or other *ba sivo*) and then apply them to his own skin, or stick them in his armlet. The express explanation in this case was that the Taro man, through the medium of the taro medicine, was taking the ill-disposed spirit from the sick man back to himself, where it would do no harm. 755

These methods of the doctor are reinforced by placatory offerings to the spirits. No uncommon sight is a spear driven into the ground before the door of a sick man and weighted with the valuable shell or boar's tusk ornaments which are the Orokaiva's wealth. These are offerings to the spirit who is causing the illness, and are meant to buy off his displeasure. They are set up commonly under directions from the Taro man, and in the event of a recovery they are likely to become his property. If the offerings be of no avail, however, and the patient should die, the Taro man is careful to explain that the ornaments are returned to his people. 756 782

The question of payment for the semi-professional services of the Taro doctor is not an easy one. Very often he endeavours to conceal the truth because he has formed the impression that such payments are discountenanced by the Government. It is certain, however, that the taking of payment is a regular practice. It has been pointed out already that the initiator (to use a set term) commonly receives some reward from the initiated (p. 33). The payment of the doctor is a different matter: it is easy to imagine that it might develop into a system of extortion. Sometimes, no doubt, with relatives and fellow villagers, the doctor's services are given free. One man assured me this was so, but afterwards, in a forgetful moment, admitted that his brother-in-law had given him a 'feather-hair' and a trade looking-glass in acknowledgement of a cure. Seldom, I believe, does the doctor send in a metaphorical account. Rather does 756 ●

● 756 the patient make him a present, which he accepts, probably with no attempt to conceal his disgust if it be too small. A number of informants being told that the European doctor had a habit of rendering his account, replied that it was not so with the New Guinea doctor: sometimes his patients paid; sometimes they did not; but, unlike the white man, he was not wild with those who did not choose to pay. One old man, ex-corporal of police, said he was well enough aware of the white man's custom in this matter and intended to act up to it himself. Whereas formerly he had been over-generous with his skill, he now meant to insist on payment or would stand by and see the patient die. These protestations notwithstanding, it is customary to pay or reward the doctor.

I have no definite instance of out-and-out extortion, though I should be very reluctant to assert that extortion is never practised by the Taro man. As was pointed out, the native is shrewd enough to conceal what he knows to be unlawful, so that we cannot look for candid confession.

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821 It is natural enough that the Taro specialist should claim some authority over the weather. Although this weather-control is of small importance among his other activities, it deserves a brief mention. When, as so often, the afternoon sky is darkened by approaching rain, and the success of the feast is threatened, the Taro man will utter a loud inarticulate cry, a true note without rise or fall, and prolonged to the limit of his lungs' endurance. He may sweep the clouds back with angry gestures and cry *Wa doio*, 'Cease rain!' or *Hambujo*, *bambujo*, 'Rain, rain go away!' He may have medicines such as the branches of *Isuga* or *Esege*, which are scorched in the fire and flourished against the oncoming storm; indeed, it was maintained by some that without the medicine (which is likely to be a close secret) a man would yell and wave his arms entirely in vain.

Sometimes the rain is averted, sometimes it disregards the Taro man and gives him a wetting. A number of young men sitting in the *ba oro* were watching with

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789 doubt often accused of bringing it on. It is not to be  
 821 supposed that weather-control belongs exclusively to the  
 754 exponents of the new cult. It is merely an old-time  
 institution which they have adapted to their own pur-  
 pose; but this purpose is not always wholly in the  
 public interest. It might probably be said that to the  
 benevolence of magic there is always a reverse or male-  
 volent side—sorcery. The native doctor is believed in  
 because of some secret powers, or some secret methods :  
 directly he uses these for an anti-social end he becomes  
 a sorcerer. It is unnecessary to say that the sorcerer is  
 believed to use his evil powers far more often than he  
 actually attempts to use them : he is a sorcerer more by  
 public opinion than by his own intent. But in this  
 credulity he has the weapon for terrorism and extortion  
 if he care to make use of it. A native doctor is a potential  
 sorcerer : he can strike as well as cure.

X-794 Even when he merely refuses to cure he falls under  
 754 suspicion among his neighbours. It was reported to me  
 756 that a certain *Baigona* man was refusing to treat a patient.  
 The informant—first brother to the patient—asked that  
 the doctor might be haled before the magistrate and sent  
 to jail. He had every confidence in the skill of the  
*Baigona* man, and considered it a dastardly thing that he  
 should refuse to treat the dying man. Nowadays it is  
 admitted that *Baigona* was full of sorcery. But the  
*Baigona* cult is virtually a thing of the past and witnesses  
 will discourse of it with freedom. With regard to the  
 Taro cult they hold their tongues, or guard them. *A*  
*priori*, however, there is good reason to suppose that the  
 Taro men do practise a certain amount of sorcery.

X-794 One or two positive instances may be given in which  
 754 the Taro men were apparently guilty of the offence.  
 627 Quite recently the *Diroga* was brought to the village of  
 Aruruta, where it flourished with true evangelistic vigour.  
 Soon after the magistrate at Ioma was astonished to be  
 confronted by a whole round-up of prisoners from the  
 newly converted Aruruta, brought in by several con-

## SECTS OF THE TARO AND VARIANT CULTS 73

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158 and it is certain that his followers did not need a rainbow to send them into a fit. The *Eriri* men carry spears and have a more or less distinctive form of *jipari*: they grip the spear and stand, trembling and dithering, for a minute or more at a time. Other *Eriri* men, recognizing their confreres in this condition, will come and shake them by the hand. The aim of the *Eriri* men is primarily to make the taro grow, but one witness informed me that when he saw a rainbow in the sky he would know it was the right time to go pig-hunting.

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535 The *Hobora*, or 'Rooster' men, are widely distributed in the central and southern parts of the Division. The founder of the cult is said to be Garepa of Puhemu. According to Garepa himself, his brother had died and he was mourning, having in his grief actually imposed upon himself a taboo on taro and bananas. In this condition the dead man came to him and caused a fit of *jipari*. Subsequently in a dream he met his brother on the beach near Buna, and was informed that henceforth he was to be a *Hobora* man. *Hobora* is the name both of the domestic fowl and of a certain variety of yam. Garepa was to plant his garden with taro and yams, and also to perform a distinctive dance in imitation of the rooster. The dance (of which he gave a demonstration) was a good example of the Orokaiva native dance, with its usual grace and character. Other informants assured me that Garepa in his dream had actually witnessed a number of domestic cocks performing their dance, but the prophet's own account of his experience was less picturesque. The aim of the *Hobora* men is once more to prosper the gardens, though it does not appear that any special prominence was given to the yam *Hobora*. As a proof of his efficiency Garepa brought four immense taros to exhibit at our interview; these, he said, would show what he could do with his *jipari*. Other exponents of *Hobora*, however, declared that they were not Taro specialists, but curers of the sick.

X-794 The Manau cult has been described by others (vide